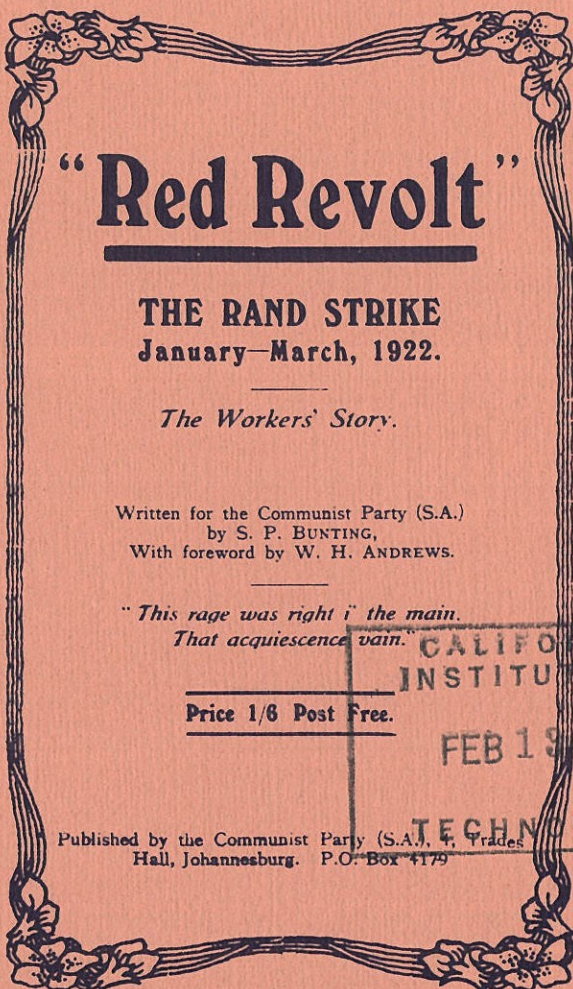


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The USSR, Its Communist Allies,
and Southern Africa

Dr. David E. Albright

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The USSR, Its Communist Allies,
and Southern Africa

Dr. David E. Albright

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A NOTE ON THE AUTHOR

David Albright is a well informed, studious, and articulate scholar with a delightful sense of humor and a refreshing perspective on his scholarship.

He was born in Indiana on October 14, 1936, and went on to take bachelor (1958) and masters (1960) degrees from the University of Indiana. He served in the United States Army from 1962 to 1964. In 1972, he received his Ph.D. from Columbia University, where his thesis was entitled, "Soviet Union, Communist China, and Ghana, 1955-1966."

Dr. Albright is currently with the United States International Communication Agency, the successor to the United States Information Agency, in Washington, D.C. He is senior editor of their journal, Problems of Communism.

Dr. Albright delivered this paper of which we publish a revised version, at a symposium at "The Wilderness" in the Cape Province of South Africa in October 1980. The symposium drew seventy-five influential black and white South Africans and black and white Americans, and was held under the auspices of the United States-South Africa Leader Exchange Program.

The author's essay does not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Government.

Ned Munger

THE USSR, ITS COMMUNIST ALLIES, AND SOUTHERN AFRICA

Dr. David E. Albright

Since the demise of the Portuguese empire in the mid-1970s, the USSR and its Communist allies -- notably, Cuba and the German Democratic Republic (GDR) -- have manifestly increased their activities in Southern Africa. However, the key issue concerning these activities is not so much their expansion, but the way in which the leaderships in Moscow, Havana, and East Berlin view them. In short, what sort of policy underlies such undertakings?

In approaching this subject, it is important to bear in mind several things. To begin with, one must really speak of policies, rather than just a single policy. Both Cuba and the GDR have perceived interests and objectives in the area that are distinct from those of the Soviet Union.¹ Fidel Castro, for example, has long regarded himself as a champion of "national liberation" and revolution in the Third World, and he has sought to project such an image abroad. Indeed, his government provided military advisers and other forms of aid to selected "national liberation" movements in Africa and elsewhere in the Third World as long ago as the early 1960s -- at a time when considerable tension existed between Havana and Moscow. By the same token, the Cuban Revolutionary Armed Forces, the most important institution of the Castro regime, have tended to favor activism in Africa for their own organizational reasons. They have seen military engagements overseas not only as a way of enhancing their international prestige and their political influence at home, but also as a means of improving their military effectiveness and of upgrading the weapons systems they have available to them. For its part, the GDR has felt a need to develop close relations with the existing and potential black governments throughout Africa to strengthen its delimitation from the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). In the early 1970s, the GDR managed to gain nearly universal diplomatic recognition as well as membership in the United Nations, but to do so it had to accept a special relationship with the FRG which greatly weakened the foundations of the division of Germany between

East and West. Thus, the leadership in East Berlin has been increasingly concerned about solidifying the division in every manner possible in order to ensure domestic stability and internal security in the GDR. East German leaders have also evinced a growing desire to guarantee access to the raw materials and minerals in Southern Africa as a hedge against reduction of supplies from fellow members of the Council of Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA). Since the GDR does not have a great many natural resources of its own, it must buy a large portion of its raw materials, minerals, and food from abroad, and it has in the past obtained the bulk of these imports from other CMEA states, especially the USSR. With the mounting economic problems of the Soviet Union and Moscow's need to meet rising domestic demands for such goods, however, there has been increasing question as to how long such an approach will be viable.

Moreover, both Havana and East Berlin have looked upon cooperation with the USSR in Africa as a means of enhancing their leverage on Soviet policy in places of more immediate concern to them. The present regimes in Cuba and the GDR each depend heavily on Soviet support to remain in power. Fidel Castro's government, for instance, receives large amounts of economic aid from the Soviet Union, to say nothing of military supplies. The GDR government, similarly, relies greatly upon the USSR to defend its diplomatic position in Europe and to prevent domestic challenges to its authority. Under such circumstances, there is considerable danger that Moscow may ride roughshod over Cuban or GDR concerns unless Cuban and East German leaders can at least partially offset their dependence by showing the Soviet Union that retaining their goodwill has positive, not just negative, aspects. What happened during the Soviet push for detente in the early 1970s affords a good illustration of this danger. Moscow forced the GDR to be more forthcoming on matters such as Berlin than the East Germans wished to be, and it even brought about the replacement of Walter Ulbricht as First Secretary of the GDR's governing party, the Socialist Unity Party (SED), when he tried to resist Soviet pressure to get in step with the USSR.

Despite the fact that Cuba and the GDR have their own separate interests and objectives, however, neither possesses a great many capabilities for operating independently in Southern Africa.² For example, although both can and do provide military advisers to various governments and groups in the area, each lacks the air- and sealfight capacity as well as the logistical support base to project significant military power there on its own. Furthermore, neither boasts sufficient economic resources to make much of an impact on the region's economic needs. Cuba is a developing country, and, as already noted, it at present requires large infusions of Soviet aid to subsist. What it can offer in the economic realm is essentially technical assistance, especially personnel. Although the GDR is more industrialized and has a higher standard of living than any other Communist state, it has experienced mounting economic problems at home over the last

decade, particularly since the beginning of the rise of world oil prices in the wake of the 1973 Arab-Israeli war. As a consequence, it has had to impose heavy restrictions on economic help to, and trade with, all Third World countries.

In addition, Cuba and the GDR, because they seek to increase their leverage on Soviet policy in areas less remote from them than Africa, find themselves under other constraints in Southern Africa. They can basically work toward this end only through cooperation with the USSR in the region. Activities of too independent a nature in the area run the risk of being counterproductive in the broader context. While each has the option of trying to persuade Moscow to pursue a course in line with its own prescriptions, neither can marshal major inducements in this regard aside from the force of the logic of its argument. Therefore, both Cuba and the GDR have had to tailor their concrete ventures to the broad framework of Soviet policy. For this reason, as well as in its own right, Soviet policy requires detailed consideration.

I

Soviet policy toward Southern Africa has been fairly complicated. This characteristic stems from the complexities of the relationship among the USSR's interests, capabilities, objectives, strategy, and involvements. In the abstract, each of these elements should flow inexorably out of the preceding ones, but in practice such neat linkages rarely, if ever, pertain with regard to any country's foreign policy. For states, like the Soviet Union, with concerns that blanket the globe, the linkages tend to become intricate indeed when one focuses on policy toward any individual geographic area.

Moscow's perceived interests apropos of Southern Africa specifically can be grouped under two general headings. From the Soviet standpoint, one is positive in nature and the other is negative.

The positive category encompasses four items. First, the USSR has an interest in playing a role in the resolution of racial conflict in the area to reinforce its claims to status as a global power. As early as the late 1950s, Nikita Khrushchev sought to win recognition as a global power for the USSR in the wake of Soviet achievements in rocketry, but as it became clear in the early 1960s, and especially after the Cuban missile crisis of 1962, that the United States still enjoyed nuclear superiority, Moscow temporarily abandoned this effort. With the buildup of Soviet strategic forces in the 1960s, however, the USSR in the 1970s revived its claims to such a status. In April 1971, for instance, USSR Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko averred: "Today there is no question of any significance which can be decided without the

Soviet Union or in opposition to it."³ Yet, as Soviet leaders are exceedingly conscious, global power status must be self-achieved, self-asserted, and self-sustained. It does not flow from divine right or the consent of the international community.⁴ Thus, the more major international issues to whose resolution the USSR can show it is indispensable, the greater weight its contentions that it is a global power will have. And the racial conflict in Southern Africa certainly qualifies as a major international issue in Soviet eyes.⁵

Second, the USSR has an interest in gaining local support to maintain a presence in the area. To validate a claim to global power status, any country must demonstrate its global reach,⁶ and such a demonstration normally requires not just intermittent forays into distant regions but a sustained presence in those regions. Establishing this kind of presence in any given area is greatly facilitated by the cooperation of local governments there. Soviet leaders have given ample signs in Southern Africa that they understand this fact. Not only has the USSR reached agreement with the black-ruled states there on many political, cultural, and economic activities that have brought Soviet personnel into the area, but it has also obtained the approval of some of them for certain types of Soviet military ventures. The last include the supply of arms and military advisers, calls of Soviet warships at local ports, and the use of local airfields by Soviet planes for purposes of reconnaissance.⁷

Third, the USSR has an interest in guaranteeing access to the raw materials and minerals in the area. Southern Africa is richly endowed with the latter in particular. Among these are oil, platinum, chrome, vanadium, gold, manganese, fluorspar, diamonds, nickel, uranium, zinc, phosphate, asbestos, antimony, lead, iron ore, coal, titanium, copper, quartz, alabaster, and silicate. South Africa alone possesses the largest reserves of platinum, chrome, vanadium, gold, manganese, and fluorspar of any country in the world. It also ranks second in reserves of diamonds; third in reserves of nickel; fourth in reserves of uranium, zinc, and phosphate; fifth in reserves of asbestos, antimony, and lead; sixth in reserves of iron ore and coal; eighth in reserves of titanium; and tenth in reserves of copper.⁸ While Soviet commentaries invariably stress the West's alleged designs on these minerals and eschew any hint of a Soviet concern with them, the commentaries reveal a clear understanding of the magnitude,⁹ and these resources, and this is sufficient to make them of considerable potential value to Moscow as it endeavors to cope with some problems that loom on the horizon for the USSR. Although the USSR itself possesses enough reserves of the minerals Southern Africa has to offer to make it essentially self-sufficient, claims on Soviet output of such minerals do not stem just from domestic demand. The USSR also serves as the major supplier of these minerals to its fellow members of CMEA, particularly those in Eastern Europe. As of the early 1980s, however, the Soviet Union already appears to be finding it hard to meet CMEA needs in the

case of oil, and the likelihood that it will experience increasing difficulties in this realm as the decade progresses seems high. Similar states of affair could rise in the near future with respect to other minerals as well.¹⁰ Under these circumstances, Moscow has strong incentives to ensure access to Southern Africa's mineral resources for itself and its allies. These incentives are bolstered by specific economic conditions in the USSR itself. Because of inefficiencies of extraction, the location of deposits, the investments required to exploit deposits, and other factors, it may soon become cheaper for the Soviet Union to meet a portion of its internal demand for minerals, such as iron ore through imports than to rely essentially on domestic production.¹¹

Fourth, the USSR has an interest in the radicalization of the area. Moscow does not, to be sure, see much chance of the emergence there in the near future of governments which it would regard as genuinely Marxist-Leninist in character. For example, it describes the self-styled Marxist-Leninists who rule Angola and Mozambique at present as "revolutionary democrats," maintaining that "there have been no irreversible processes" in these countries yet.¹² Furthermore, it depicts "the strengthening of . . . political independence" and "the consolidation of . . . economic independence" even here as "complex and lengthy processes during which the people have to overcome major difficulties."¹³ Nevertheless, Soviet officials are highly aware of the benefits that the USSR derived from the collapse of the Portuguese empire in Africa and the rise to power of radical black governments in the former Portuguese colonies in Southern Africa,¹⁴ and Soviet commentaries suggest that Moscow expects similar political transitions in the region to produce comparable results.¹⁵ While the coolness toward the USSR of the new government of Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe may have dampened this expectation somewhat, there is no indication that it has disappeared.

The negative category of Soviet interests includes three items. First, the USSR has an interest in undermining the position of the West in the area. In Moscow's eyes matters, the Soviet Union is engaged in a competition with the West for influence in Southern Africa, and this competition amounts to a zero-sum game. That is, gains for one side involve losses for the other side, or vice versa. A Soviet analyst recently conveyed the perspective in the following fashion with regard to Africa as a whole: "Despite all efforts undertaken by the United States, the main tendency consists in the gradual weakening of the positions of the leading Western powers on the continent. With the material and moral-political support of the socialist community, the African people are inflicting one defeat after another on imperialism."¹⁶ In such a framework, Western influence must decrease for the Soviet role in Southern Africa to grow. At the same time, Moscow regards a precipitate departure by the West from the region as undesirable from the Soviet standpoint. As it has pointed out in a more general context, "the Soviet Union's potential for rendering

economic assistance is not infinite," and, "of course, the Soviet Union cannot fail to be concerned for the well-being of its own people."¹⁷ Thus, Soviet commentators have come more and more to emphasize the need for "a long-term strategy" for "the industrialization of the former colonies and semi-colonies according to fundamentally different principles of social and international economic relations than those inherent in capitalism."¹⁸

Second, the USSR has an interest in limiting, and wherever possible, reducing Chinese influence in the area. For years now, Moscow has viewed the People's Republic of China as a threat to the USSR's efforts to establish itself as the chief patron of "national liberation" and revolutionary movements throughout the Third World, and especially in Africa.¹⁹ Soviet writers have repeatedly charged Beijing with seeking "to present Maoism as the only new and revolutionary liberation doctrine suited to African conditions" and "to undermine the solidarity of the three revolutionary trends in the modern world" by setting "the national liberation movements against the world socialist system and the international workers movement."²⁰ As evidence, they have cited particularly China's support of the National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA) against the Soviet-backed Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) in the Angolan civil war of the mid-1970s.²¹ In such a context, the struggle with China for influence in Southern Africa assumes the features of a zero-sum game, too.

Third, the USSR has an interest in impeding Western access to the raw materials and minerals in the area and in disrupting Western use of the sea lanes around the southern end of the continent. As noted previously, Southern Africa, and especially South Africa, has a great wealth of minerals. Moreover, these mineral resources are plainly of significance to the West. For example, the region constitutes the major non-Communist source of supply of a number of minerals important to the West's advanced industrialized economies -- e.g., chromium, platinum, and manganese.²² The sea lanes that lie around the region have equal significance for the West. More than half of Western Europe's oil and 20 percent of the United States' oil travels through these waters on its way from the Persian Gulf to its ultimate destination.²³ Of such facts, Moscow is exceptionally well aware. Indeed, Soviet commentaries harp on them continually -- always with the implication that they reflect Western vulnerabilities.²⁴

II

To some extent, these various interests are complementary to one another, but they are not entirely so. For instance, attempts to impose a solution of the racial conflict in Southern Africa to substantiate the USSR's global power status could have an adverse impact on efforts to gain local support to maintain a

presence in the area. By the same token, undertakings to impede Western access to the minerals of the region would be hard to reconcile with long-term attempts to eliminate Western influence there in ways that did not entail crushing economic burdens for the Soviet Union.

Far more critical, Southern Africa does not exist in a vacuum for the USSR, and some of these interests conflict with other, broader interests that Moscow perceives. Soviet leaders, for example, seem to believe that the USSR has an interest in avoiding escalation of the racial conflict and guerrilla wars of the area into a nuclear confrontation with the United States. Although they have argued that detente does not prohibit them from assisting "national liberation movements" in the Third World,²⁵ they have in practice kept a close eye on the reactions of the United States as they have stepped up their intervention in African countries such as Angola and Ethiopia. Only when it has become manifest that the United States is not going to respond militarily have they committed the USSR in an all out fashion.²⁶ Similarly, Moscow seems to see an interest in eschewing actions in places like Southern Africa which would encourage the United States to try to regain strategic military superiority. It recognizes that Soviet behavior in Afghanistan has fueled talk in the United States about such a move, and it fears that the United States has the means to achieve this goal if the country actually set out to do so.²⁷

Soviet leaders also seem to regard it as in the USSR's interest to refrain from activities in areas like Southern Africa which would cause Western Europe to reduce its economic ties with CMEA countries. During the 1970s, trade between Western Europe and the CMEA expanded greatly; moreover, Western Europe constituted the major source of what new technology the USSR acquired from abroad.²⁸ When the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979 threatened to disrupt these links, Moscow quickly sought to prevent such a development. Leonid Brezhnev, for example, has met with both French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing and West German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt to assure them of the Soviet Union's continued dedication to detente.

Moscow appears to feel, too, that the USSR has an interest in abstaining from behavior in places such as Southern Africa which would fan the distrust that its move into Afghanistan has generated among Third World countries. Throughout the 1970s, the Soviet Union worked diligently, with the help of Cuba and other sympathetic states, to persuade Third World countries that the socialist states are the "natural allies" of the world's nonaligned. The real division of the globe, it contended, lay not between big and small, the rich and poor, but between socialism and imperialism.²⁹ Although the USSR's growing disposition to intervene in conflicts in Africa produced misgivings on the part of some Third World countries,³⁰ the trend in the Third World prior to the Soviet incursion into Afghanistan was toward acceptance of this argument. However, the Afghanistan affair has drastically altered

the situation. Not only did most of the Third World support the U.N. General Assembly resolution in January 1980 to condemn the Soviet invasion -- the only African states that endorsed the USSR's version of the intervention were Angola, Mozambique, and Ethiopia -- but a large number of countries echoed the view of Nigeria's U.N. Ambassador that "in the end" the nonaligned countries had to conclude that "there are no natural allies."³¹ Without retreating from their charted path in Afghanistan, Soviet leaders have evinced a strong desire to mitigate this damage to their position in the Third World. For instance, they have tried to give the appearance of flexibility with regard to the length of time Soviet troops will remain in Afghanistan, they vigorously lobbied Third World (especially Islamic countries) not to boycott the Olympic games, and they have even enlisted Central Asian Muslims to present the Soviet case for the invasion to the Third World.³²

More indirectly, but no less significantly, the interests that Moscow perceives in Southern Africa inevitably compete with the interests that it perceives in other parts of the world. Since the USSR has pretensions as a global power, Soviet leaders have defined its interests in those terms. Indeed, there is virtually no place in the world now about which they do not articulate some type of Soviet interest. At the same time, the USSR must confront its lack of omnipotence. Because it does not have unlimited resources, it cannot possibly pursue all its interests simultaneously. Therefore, Moscow must pick and choose among its interests. This situation pits those in one area against those in others.

III

The concrete Soviet objectives in Southern Africa that have emerged from this welter of considerations have been determined by a mixture of Moscow's geopolitical priorities and the USSR's general capabilities to operate in the region. As to the former, Southern Africa occupies a position well down on the list.³³ Since the early days of the Bolshevik Revolution, Europe has stood at the center of Moscow's geopolitical concerns. It was from Europe that the chief threats to the Soviet state originated during the interwar period, culminating in the traumatic German invasion of 1941. Moreover, Europe has been the main arena of the USSR's competition with the United States since the end of World War II. Soviet commentators, it is true, find it expedient to speak of South Africa as a European implant on the African continent, but they leave no doubt that they understand fully the physical and psychological distance that separates it from Western Europe.³⁴

East Asia has followed close behind Europe since at least the 1960s. The USSR found itself in armed combat with Japan from time to time during the 1930s and 1940s and had an indirect role in the war on the Korean peninsula in the 1950s, but it was not until

after the Sino-Soviet split in the early 1960s that the area took on its current importance for Moscow. In the mid-1960s, Mao Zedong revived Chinese complaints about the "unequal treaties" that had transferred vast Asian territories from the Chinese Empire to Tsarist Russia, and Beijing acquired nuclear weapons. This combination of events convinced Soviet leaders of the presence of a security threat on their eastern borders. Japan's rise as a major economic power during the 1960s merely confirmed the critical nature of the region in Moscow's eyes.

Third place on the list has gone to the southern rimlands of the USSR -- that is, the countries forming an arc south of the Soviet Union, from South Asia around to North Africa -- since the mid-1960s. Prior to then, it should be underscored, Moscow had bestowed this ranking on varied groupings of states over the years. During the early post-revolutionary period, for example, it accorded the honor to the countries to the USSR's immediate south. Later, with Josef Stalin's rise to power and the advent of the world depression, it broadened the focus to the colonies of the West European powers more generally -- first with the aim of weakening these powers in the European context, but afterward with the goal of encouraging them to resist the pressures of Fascist Germany. In the initial post-World War II years, it limited the ranking to essentially the colonies and newly emerging states of South and Southeast Asia. As empires collapsed and more and more colonies acquired their independence, Nikita Khrushchev expanded the scope of concern once again -- to include Asia as a whole, then Africa as well, and ultimately even Latin America. But disappointment with the behavior of many of the states in these areas soon caused him to narrow its definition to those states which he deemed had genuine revolutionary potential. Conviction that there was little possibility for Communist breakthroughs in the Third World in the foreseeable future led Khrushchev's successors to abandon his concept of the ranking in the mid-1960s and to replace it with concentration on the southern rimlands of the USSR. In contrast with the flux of earlier years, no new shifts in the nature of the ranking have now occurred for a substantial period of time. Such stability would appear to indicate that the southern rimlands of the USSR have gained a fairly firm hold on the third spot on Moscow's list of geopolitical priorities.

Beyond this level, it is somewhat harder to pin down precise rankings, for these have fluctuated greatly in recent years, largely in line with the opportunities available to the USSR. Nevertheless, one thing directly relevant to the comparative position of Southern Africa in these rankings can be said. The Horn of Africa clearly enjoys a higher priority than does Southern Africa. Serious Soviet attention to the Horn began in the late 1950s and picked up appreciably in the 1960s, especially with Moscow's courtship of Somalia. By the early 1970s, the USSR had acquired access to various facilities of military utility in Somalia, including the port at Berbera, and soon thereafter it

concluded a treaty of friendship and cooperation with Mogadishu -- the first such document it had signed with any African country. When its efforts to cultivate ties as well with the revolutionary military government in Ethiopia resulted in the loss of its position in Somalia, Moscow moved to bolster its relations with Ethiopia by conducting a massive air- and sealoft of weapons, Cuban combat troops, and Soviet military advisers into the country to repel the invading Somali forces that sought to wrest the Ogaden from Addis Ababa's control. This effort led to an investment of nearly \$2 billion in arms alone.³⁵ In carrying out these diverse ventures, the USSR has evinced a keen awareness of the Horn's strategic importance. This derives not only from its location at one end of the transit route between the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean (via the Suez Canal and the Red Sea) but also from its proximity to the outlet of the Persian Gulf, whence flow many of the West's vital oil supplies.³⁶

Soviet capabilities to function in Southern Africa have reached significant dimensions, but they are by no means unlimited. In the political and diplomatic realm, the USSR has a number of assets upon which it can draw. Since the late 1950s, Moscow has sought to train a corps of academic specialists on Africa, and while this effort has proceeded in fits and starts in accordance with the ups and downs of Soviet relations with the continent, the results by this juncture are reasonably impressive. Not only do these specialists turn out substantial quantities of writings about Africa -- including Southern Africa -- but they also engage in dialogue with the educated elite of the continent, politicians as well as intellectuals and academicians, through correspondence, mutual visits, and the like. Since the late 1950s, too, Moscow has developed a body of diplomats with experience in working on African problems and in African countries. In the case of Southern Africa, their direct contacts with the local African milieu (specifically, with Zambia) began in the 1960s and have expanded considerably over the intervening years. It should be underlined as well that the division between academic specialist and diplomat is somewhat artificial, for individuals tend to move back and forth between the two roles. Prior to his posting to Zambia in the mid-1970s, for example, the current Soviet ambassador there, V. Solodovnikov, served as director of the African Institute of the USSR Academy of Sciences for a decade. Only two (banned) Communist parties exist in the area -- the multiracial South African Communist Party and the Lesotho Communist Party -- but both are pro-Soviet in orientation. Of the two, the former is by far the more significant. Though in itself a weak and largely exile organization, it maintains close ties with the multiracial African National Congress (ANC) of South Africa. Indeed, some of its members (predominantly whites) reportedly hold posts in the ANC apparatus.³⁷ Thus, the South African party constitutes an avenue of influence on the ANC for Moscow. It should likewise be noted that even though Soviet officials regard the ruling parties of Angola and Mozambique as "revolutionary-democratic" organizations rather than the Marxist-Leninist bodies that they claim to be, the

Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) has still forged party-to-party links with them. In keeping with these, it has even furnished ideological and organizational training for the cadres of the African parties.³⁸ Although such institutional ties by no means provide the USSR with control over the ruling bodies in the two African states, they do afford an additional channel through which Moscow can communicate with the Angolan and Mozambican leaderships and press its views. The nonaligned movement offers the USSR some potential for shaping events in Southern Africa because of the close Soviet relationship with Cuba, Havana's contention that the USSR is a "natural ally" of the nonaligned, and Fidel Castro's position as nominal head of the movement until the movement's next summit. That potential, however, has dropped greatly as a result of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the subsequent response of the Third World to the intervention. Finally, the USSR's status as a permanent member of the U.N. Security Council is of some consequence with regard to Southern Africa. Not only does it permit Moscow to have a say in defining any threats to international security in that area, but it also allows Soviet leaders to obstruct any U.N. attempt to deal with such threats, by virtue of the veto powers that this status confers.

It is in the economic sphere that Soviet capabilities for influencing events in Southern Africa are weakest. In part, this weakness stems from the general condition of the Soviet economy. Although the USSR has a gross national product of only about half that of the United States, the 1970s witnessed a drop in the annual growth rate of its GNP to about 3 percent. Moreover, even the most optimistic estimates for the 1980s foresee a growth rate of somewhat less than 3 percent, while the more pessimistic projections run all the way to total stagnation.³⁹ These gloomy prospects reflect not only the end of the era when high rates of growth could be assured through increasing inputs of labor and capital, but also an impending energy crisis and a manpower shortage. In part, the weakness derives from structural imbalances between the Soviet economy and the economies of Southern Africa. Despite the potential utility of at least some of the raw materials and minerals available in Southern Africa, the USSR has a primary need for advanced technology and sophisticated manufactured goods to cope with the deficiencies and problems of its domestic economy, and these it must obtain largely from the industrialized capitalist states. To finance such imports, it must either export to the industrialized capitalist states or pay in hard currency. Because of the overall restrictions on its capacity to export and of its limited reserves of hard currency, it finds great constraints on its ability to trade with any of the developing world. Throughout most of the 1970s, for instance, Soviet trade with the industrialized capitalist states made up roughly 25-30 percent of the USSR's overall foreign trade, while trade with all the developing states together comprised only about half that figure.⁴⁰

In trying to define Soviet capabilities in Southern Africa precisely, however, one must recognize that the USSR's economic

performance to date in the area may somewhat understate these capabilities. To begin with, it must be remembered that the former Portuguese colonies in the region did not gain their independence -- and hence become candidates for assistance and potential trade partners -- until the mid-1970s. Furthermore, aid and trade figures for the 1970s may reflect Moscow's priorities in committing its finite resources far more than its capabilities. Although Southern Africa received only \$22 million in Soviet economic aid during 1970-78, Moscow's total economic help to Third World countries during that period amounted to \$10,529 million.⁴¹ Much the same picture emerges with respect to trade. During 1976-78, the USSR's average annual exports to Southern Africa amounted to 50.0 million rubles, and its average annual imports from the region totaled 11.7 million rubles. These figures compared with average annual exports to all developing countries of a little more than 4 billion rubles and average annual imports from them of roughly 3.7 billion rubles.⁴²

Soviet capabilities in the military realm have now reached substantial proportions. For a long while, the USSR has had the capacity to supply enough arms and military advisers to Southern Africa to sustain prolonged guerrilla struggles throughout the area and/or meet the needs of local independent states there. Indeed, it had by the 1970s become the largest producer of conventional arms in the world; moreover, Moscow has traditionally evinced reluctance simply to discard obsolescent weaponry. The critical factor governing arms transfers and the dispatch of military advisers, then, has been, and continues to be, the willingness of local elements in Southern Africa to accept them from the USSR.⁴³

What is relatively new is the Soviet capacity to project its own force and/or that of its allies into Southern Africa. Since 1969, there has been a permanent Soviet naval presence in the Indian Ocean, and a Soviet West Africa patrol has operated in the Eastern Atlantic since 1970. Both of these naval forces could move to the waters off Southern Africa on fairly short notice. The USSR has improved its air- and sealift capabilities to the point where its own troops and/or those of its allies could be dispatched in strength to the area. By and large the airlift elements (numbering 1550 aircraft) are topflight in nature, and Moscow is continuing to enhance them by replacing the An-12 with the Il-76, which has a cargo capacity of 44 tons -- double that of the AN-12. The sealift elements, in contrast, are quantitatively and qualitatively in a lower league, although the Soviets are attempting to remedy the weaknesses. In 1978, for example, the USSR completed the first of a new class of amphibious ships, each of which carries four landing craft, and construction of roll-on/roll-off ships proceeds apace, with more than 20 of them already in service. As for troops, Moscow has in recent years created several new airborne divisions (though some reportedly are not maintained at full strength in men and equipment), bringing the total to eight. In addition, it has some special-duty brigades that it can employ to supplement these units. With regard to naval infantry, the USSR has 12,000 men

altogether. They are divided into five naval infantry regiments -- each with three infantry battalions and one tank battalion -- dispersed among the USSR's four fleets. For air cover, these naval infantry forces must rely on the limited types of planes that the Kiev-class vertical-takeoff aircraft carriers (of which only two have thus far entered service) can accommodate.⁴⁴

But, as Moscow well knows, military capabilities cannot be assessed in the abstract. That is, precise military capabilities depend upon the concrete circumstances under which the use of armed forces would take place. And a close look at the USSR's capabilities in the most likely contexts for its direct military involvement in Southern Africa points up the limited nature of its capacity to operate in the area militarily.

In the event that the USSR sought to come to the aid of a political faction in one of the black-ruled states in Southern Africa after the outbreak of a civil war or some other breakdown of central authority, the opposing elements would have little chance without outside help, for local military forces in these countries are no match for Soviet troops, or even the troops of an ally such as Cuba, equipped with sophisticated Soviet arms. However, as Moscow is keenly aware, it is far from certain that these opposing elements would be unable to obtain outside assistance, and Western, particularly U.S., aid would render the outcome of the strife far more problematic -- with the possible exception of a conflict in Angola, where an estimated 19,000 Cuban troops remain in the aftermath of the 1975-76 civil war.⁴⁵ Soviet leaders, of course, would have the option of transferring at least some of the Cuban troops in Angola to the scene of any conflict, but they would still probably have to dispatch additional troops from the USSR or one of its allies to take care of the security situation in Angola and to wage the battle under way elsewhere. Here some of the advantages that the United States enjoys in terms of capabilities for the projection of its forces to remote theaters would become a factor.

According to a reliable estimate at the end of 1978, the United States can airlift twice as much, in terms of millions of ton-miles a day, as the Soviet Union, for American transports have longer ranges than their Soviet counterparts and possess an in-flight refueling capability. The U.S. amphibious fleet boasts three times as much single-lift capacity as its Soviet counterpart. Not only is the U.S. Marine Corps 15 times as large as the Soviet Naval Infantry, but it can sustain operations for a month without resupply, as compared with a week for the Soviet forces. U.S. carrier-based aircraft greatly surpass the USSR's sea-based aircraft in range, endurance, and firepower. Furthermore, the capacity of the United States to conduct under-way replenishment of aircraft while forces are in transit vastly exceeds that of the Soviet Union.⁴⁶

Perhaps more probable would be a Soviet intervention in behalf of black elements attempting to topple the white-controlled

governments in Namibia or South Africa. In either case, the USSR and/or its allies would come up against South African military forces. Although leading South African military figures such as Minister of Defense Magnus Malan have cautioned that the Pretoria government cannot hope to win a sustained war against both domestic and foreign foes, that government's capacity for defending terrain under its purview is nonetheless formidable at present. The Republic of South Africa has standing armed forces of 86,050, and it can mobilize 404,500 men on short notice. A prolonged callup of such dimensions, to be sure, would greatly disrupt the national economy, but the availability of this number on even a short-term basis still constitutes a powerful deterrent factor. In addition, the Republic possesses more than 400 combat aircraft in operational and training units. Among these are 51 French Mirage III and 46 F-1 fighter planes. It also boasts some 310 tanks, assorted rocket launchers and antitank weapons, and 33 naval combatants. While it denies that it has developed nuclear weapons, there can be no doubt that it has the resources and technical know-how to do so. Finally, it has an industrialized economy which has produced roughly half of the weapons and military equipment in the hands of its armed forces at the moment, thus making it the least militarily dependent of all African states.⁴⁷

To engage forces of this magnitude and sophistication frontally would plainly require at minimum, major participation of line units of the Soviet army. Of the USSR's two main allies in Southern Africa, Cuba could likely muster at most about 50,000 troops even if it withdrew the contingents that it currently has stationed in Angola and Ethiopia,⁴⁸ and the German Democratic Republic probably would not be able to furnish nearly that many. In the unlikely event that Moscow decided to commit all its various airborne and naval infantry units to the undertaking, the total forces still would amount to no more than 150,000 men.⁴⁹ Thus, they would face enormous odds unless buttressed by army line units.

Providing logistical background for such a military contingent would be a considerable task at the distances entailed -- even if the USSR succeeded in gaining access to facilities in nearby states for transit purposes. Moreover, the West, and especially the United States, could compound the difficulty by interdicting to interdict both the sea and air supply routes. In this manner, it might well succeed in thwarting the enterprise without becoming directly involved in the ground warfare -- as long as the conflict remained localized.

All things considered, then, the USSR's ability to spearhead an all-out assault on South Africa seems highly constrained at present. Its real capacities lie more in the sphere of aerial and naval harassment of South African forces. Yet even such ventures would probably necessitate safe sanctuaries in neighboring states, and they would entail a substantial risk of escalation of the conflict by South Africa.

IV

In light of its geopolitical priorities and its capabilities for operating in Southern Africa, the USSR has established five limited interlocking objectives in the area for at least the medium term. They are: (1) to stake out a role for itself in the ultimate denouement of the racial conflict in the region; (2) to promote the emergence of radical black governments in Namibia and South Africa; (3) to win local acceptance of the legitimacy of a Soviet political, economic, and even military presence in the area; (4) to weaken (though not to eradicate) the Western position in the region;⁵⁰ and (5) to curb and, to the extent possible, lessen Chinese influence in the area.⁵¹ Fulfillment of these goals, Moscow recognizes, constitutes a prerequisite for the pursuit of more ambitious ends. Indeed, Soviet officials often betray a painful awareness that in a number of other places in Africa the USSR has suffered bitter disappointments because it has allowed itself to become carried away with optimism about what could be accomplished in the foreseeable future.⁵²

In working toward the goals upon which it has settled, the USSR has adopted a simple strategy. Specifically, it has sought to win recognition for itself as the prime supporter of "anti-imperialist" and anti-racialist forces in Southern Africa.⁵³ This strategy neatly integrates its various objectives into a concrete program with a great deal of potential appeal among the local African peoples.

Since the demise of Portugal's African empire in the mid-1970s first convinced the Soviets that significant new opportunities were opening up in the area, Moscow's efforts to implement its chosen strategy have taken a multiplicity of forms. The USSR championed strong U.N. sanctions against Rhodesia until a settlement involving the guerrilla insurgents of the Patriotic Front took place there, and it has for years urged the U.N. General Assembly to reject the credentials of the representatives of the current South African government and deny them South Africa's seat in the organization. It has moved to solidify both state and party relations with the professedly Marxist-Leninist states of Angola and Mozambique; indeed, it has signed treaties of friendship and cooperation with both. It has established itself as the chief patron of the South-West African People's Organization (SWAPO), the body that is conducting guerrilla warfare in Namibia, and has reinforced its long-standing ties with the African National Congress, the oldest "national liberation" movement in South Africa. It has even forged diplomatic links with Botswana and Lesotho, two of the less ideological states in the region. Perhaps the most substantial Soviet undertakings have been in the military sphere. Not only did the USSR combine forces with Cuba to assist the Popular Front for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) to assume

power in Angola, but an estimated 1300 Soviet and East European military advisers and 19,000 Cuban troops still remain in the country to help deal with the security threat that the Luanda government perceives from South Africa and with opposition guerrilla forces that continue to operate in the bush, particularly in the south.⁵⁴ It likewise established itself as the main arms supplier for Mozambique in the mid-1970s and for Zambia in early 1980.⁵⁵ Though precise figures are unavailable, it is clear as well that the USSR has become the major source of weapons for the "national liberation" movements in the area. Until the March 1980 election in Rhodesia, the primary recipients among these movements were Joshua Nkomo's wing of the Patriotic Front of Rhodesia, the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU), and SWAPO in Namibia. But with the settlement in Rhodesia, Soviet assistance to ZAPU has apparently ceased. While the ANC of South Africa may get some arms from the USSR, this flow is at present quite modest because the ANC has not yet managed to launch a full-fledged guerrilla struggle on South African soil.

It is important to realize, however, that to date these labors have not produced fruits entirely satisfactory from Moscow's standpoint. Although both Angola and Mozambique continue to be militarily dependent on the Soviet Union, each has in recent years sought to expand its contacts and ties with the West -- especially in the economic sphere. Furthermore, each has pressured SWAPO to cooperate with the Western powers, working under U.N. auspices, in trying to bring about a negotiated solution of the conflict in Namibia. Despite Zambia's reluctant turn to the USSR for defensive arms, Lusaka reaffirmed its commitment to nonalignment by not supporting Moscow's version of the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan when the U.N. voted on the issue in January 1980. As the Soviets well know, President Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia has long harbored deep suspicions of Soviet intentions in the region. Aside from increased contacts, the new ties with Botswana and Lesotho have netted the USSR little in the short run. Certainly, the two countries have not changed their basic orientations. Undoubtedly the most severe setback that the USSR has encountered has been in Zimbabwe. Because Moscow had backed ZAPU against ZANU before the formation of the Patriotic Front and had maintained rather distant relations with Robert Mugabe even after the Front came into being, the USSR found itself at least temporarily out in the cold in the wake of Mugabe's victory in the March 1980 balloting. Mugabe's new government waited six months before it invited the Soviet Union to open an embassy in Salisbury. Close identification with the ANC has also had its disadvantages for the USSR. The ANC's long-standing rival, the Pan-Africanist Congress, has not displayed a great deal of vitality in recent years, but now both must vie for the leadership of South Africa's increasingly militant black community with other groups that have emerged within the country over the last decade or so -- the Black Consciousness organizations, the Zulu-based Inkatha, etc. These new grass-roots groups tend to regard the ANC and the PAC as essentially out of touch with the internal situation in South Africa because of

prolonged exile, and most observers believe that the ideas of the Black Consciousness movement (though not necessarily the organizations) hold greater attraction for the country's black population of the 1980s than those of the multiracial ANC.⁵⁶ Moscow has already shown signs -- particularly since events in Zimbabwe again demonstrated the perils of favoring one nationalist faction over others in volatile African situations -- of wanting to broaden its long-term options beyond association with the ANC alone, it has not had much luck in doing so thus far. Although the USSR has made overtures to some students involved in the Black Consciousness movement who have fled South Africa, these have been greeted with considerable caution. Soviet relations with all the new groups remain tenuous at best.

V

Up to now, our analysis has dealt with the current policies of the USSR and its allies toward Southern Africa. There remains the question of the prospects for the years immediately ahead.

What can be said in this regard with the least fear of contradiction is that Soviet policy will continue to shape the overall approach of the Communist alliance. While neither Cuba nor the GDR seems likely to abandon the individual interests that it has perceived with respect to Southern Africa, there is little possibility that either will succeed in greatly enhancing its capabilities to pursue those interests in the foreseeable future. Therefore, both will have to work within the broad parameters of Soviet policy to hope to be effective.

The exact nature of what Soviet policy will be is far less certain. For the moment, the USSR does not possess the capabilities to do anything it wishes in Southern Africa, but capabilities can alter. Furthermore, even with its present capabilities, Moscow could certainly bring to bear more resources in the area than its existing goals demand, if it opted to reorder its geopolitical priorities. Thus, Soviet policies must not be treated as fixed in concrete.

Nevertheless, changes -- in Southern Africa or elsewhere in the world -- of a magnitude that would dramatically affect Soviet policy in the area in the near term appear relatively improbably. Indeed, Moscow itself seems to discount such a possibility. Soviet analysts, for example, convey a strong sense that while a black-rule government will ultimately emerge in South Africa, the struggle there will be a protracted one.⁵⁷

NOTES

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2. See, for instance, Gonzalez, "Cuba, the Soviet Union, and Africa"; Croan, "East Germany in Africa."
3. Pravda, April 4, 1971.
4. For elaboration, see Vernon V. Aspaturian, "Soviet Global Power and the Correlation of Forces," Problems of Communism, Vol. 29, No. 3 (May-June 1980).
5. For a good illustration, see the article by Anatoly Gromyko, Director of the African Institute of the USSR Academy of Sciences and the son of Foreign Minister Gromyko, entitled "Western Diplomacy vs. Southern Africa," International Affairs (Moscow), No. 3 (March 1979).
6. See Aspaturian, "Soviet Global Power and the Correlation of Forces," for analysis of this imperative.

7. For more extended discussion, see David E. Albright, "Moscow's African Policy of the 1970s," in David E. Albright (ed.), Communism in Africa (Bloomington, Ind., Indiana University Press, 1980); U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, Communist Aid Activities in Non-Communist Less Developed Countries 1978, ER 79-10412U (Washington, D.C., September 1979).
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12. R. A. Ulianovskii, "On the Countries of Socialist Orientation," Kommunist, No. 11 (July 1979), p. 118. Ulianovskii is a deputy director of the International Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. For an equally definitive analysis, see the book by K. N. Brutents, another deputy director of the International Department, entitled Osvobodivshiesia strany v 70-e gody (Moscow, Izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1979).
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14. See, for instance, Anatoly Gromyko, "Africa in the Strategy of Neo-Colonialism," ibid., No. 11 (November 1978), p. 86.
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47. On South Africa's military strength, see particularly International Institute for Strategic Studies, The Military Balance 1980-1981; Chester A. Crocker, "Current and Projected Military balances in Southern Africa," in Bissell and Crocker, South Africa into the 1980s; W. Scott Thompson and Brett Silvers, "South Africa in Soviet Strategy," *ibid.* For clear evidence that Moscow is aware of South Africa's capabilities, see, for example, Tatiana Krasnopevtseva, "Military and Economic Potential," Azii i Afriki Segodnia, No. 2 (February

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49. Each of the airborne divisions has roughly 7000 men, and the naval infantry, as already mentioned, numbers 12,000. See International Institute for Strategic Studies, The Military Balance, 1979-1980.
50. Even orthodox Soviet commentators have persistently argued that "socialist-oriented states" in the Third World should attract Western capital and work out "a system of regulation . . . that will guarantee the interests of the radical regimes and grant sufficient advantages to foreign investors to attract them." See, for example, "How to Interpret the Peculiarities and Level of Development of Capitalism in Latin America," Latinskaia Amerika, No. 1 (January-February 1979), pp. 69-70. In this connection, it is not insignificant that Cuban troops today help guard the Gulf Oil facilities located in Angola's exclave of Cabinda.
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52. See, for instance, Brutents, Osvobodivshiesia strany v 70-e gody, pp. 67-77.
53. Highly explicit reflections of Soviet strategy may be found in Gromyko, "Africa in the Strategy of Neo-Colonialism," pp. 84-89, and especially idem, "Western Diplomacy vs. Southern Africa," pp. 20-28.
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